***The Circuit* Discussion Questions**

**Chapter 1: “Under the Wire” (pages 1-7)**

1. **What does *la frontera* mean and what is the significance of it in the story?**

The border; family is trying to cross border into US from Mexico

1. **What is the setting of the book?**

El Rancho Blanco (town several miles north of Guadalajara, Mexico)

1. **Where is the family headed? What does Fito tell them about this place? How are they traveling?**

California; that people sweep money off the streets; by train, second class (Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México)

1. **The story is told from what point of view? Who is the main character?**

First person; Francisco (also called Pancho or Panchito)

1. **Name the members (4 so far) in the Jiménez family.**

Francisco, Roberto (older brother), Mamá, Papá

1. **What does *la migra* mean and what is the significance of it in the story?**

Migration; immigration officials who watch the border; Francisco’s father warns them about la migra.

1. **What do the boys watch every day at noon? What does the conductor give them?**

Watch the Noon Train go by; a brown bag with apples, oranges, and candy.

**Chapter 2: “Soledad” (pages 8-11)**

1. **What does *soledad* mean? Why is it significant to this chapter? (Hint: Look at the last paragraph of the chapter.)**

Loneliness (solitary); Francisco feels all alone.

1. **What is Francisco’s job while his parents and brother work in the fields?**

Take care of Trampita

1. **Who is Trampita and how old is he?**

Francisco’s baby brother; 6 months

1. **What does Francisco do for the first time? Why does he do this?**

Pick cotton bolls; He’s lonely and knows he can be with his family if he learns how.

1. **Why are his mother and father disappointed?**

Because Francisco neglects Trampita and puts clods of dirt in the cotton bolls

**Chapter 3: “Inside Out” (pages 12-21)**

1. **At the beginning of the chapter, what is Francisco asking Roberto about? Why doesn’t he ask his parents?**

Going to school; They’ve never been to school.

1. **Where was the family picking cotton? Where are they now?**

Corcoran; Tent City (a labor camp owned by Sheehey Strawberry Farms located about 10 miles east of Santa María)

1. **What month is it when the brothers start school? Why might this be significant? Do you see any problems with this? Why or why not?**

January; The moving and working in the fields has caused them to miss a great deal of school; They’ve missed four months of school already, which is detrimental to their education.

1. **Who is Mr. Sims? Miss Scalapino? Curtis? Arthur?**

Mr. Sims = principal of the school; Miss Scalapino = Francisco’s teacher; Curtis = Francisco’s classmate who is the “biggest, strongest, and most popular kid in school,” always the captain of teams, and everyone wants to be his friend; Arthur = Francisco’s classmate who speaks Spanish

1. **What does Francisco watch in the jar?**

A caterpillar

1. **What does Mr. Sims give Francisco? What happens as a result?**

A green jacket; Francisco gets in a fight with Curtis because the jacket belongs to him.

1. **What does Francisco get a first prize blue ribbon for? What does he do with his picture? Why?**

His drawing of a butterfly; He gives it to Curtis; It’s a peace offering.

**Chapter 4: “Miracle in Tent City” (pages 22-35)**

1. **How does Mamá help pull her weight, even when she is pregnant? What about the boys?**

She cooks lunch and dinner for 20 farm workers in Tent City; The boys help her make the meals and deliver them.

1. **What does Papá make? What does Mamá use the box for? What does this tell you about them?**

An icebox; a crib for the new baby; they use what they have to create things they need.

1. **Where do the brothers go to get lumber for the floor? What does this tell you about the family’s economic status?**

To the city dump; they are very poor and make do with what they have and can find.

1. **What do you think this quote says about Francisco’s view of education: “I collected books, hoping to read them once I learned how” (24)? What does Francisco find out when he gets his report card?**

It seems as if he desires to learn and values education; his teacher Miss Scalapino says he has to repeat first grade because he doesn’t know enough English.

1. **Is Francisco’s family religious? How do you know?**

Yes; It appears they are Roman Catholic. They have pictures of the Virgen de Guadalupe and the Santo Niño de Atocha and pray to them. They also pray every day for a year to el Santo Niño hoping that Torito will be healed.

1. **Who/What do you think cured Torito? (Doña María? Praying to el Santo Niño? The blue cloak Francisco saw in his dream and Mamá sewed for Torito? A combination of any or all? Something else?) What do you think the family believes?**

Answers/opinions may vary; Probably that praying to el Santo Niño brought about a miracle

**Chapter 5: “El Angel de Oro” (pages 36-41)**

1. **What is the weather like and why does this pose a problem for the family?**

It’s rainy; they can’t work, so they may have to move.

1. **What does el Angel de Oro mean and what is it?**

The Angel of Gold; a goldfish in the neighbors’ cabin

1. **Who does Francisco meet?**

Miguelito

1. **What do they do together?**

Walk to school, jump in puddles, plan to fish, etc.

1. **Why doesn’t Miguelito meet Francisco?**

He has moved.

1. **What does Francisco try to do for the dying gray fish? Does he succeed?**

Save them by scooping them up in a coffee can and putting them back in the creek; he saves some of them, but there are too many.

1. **Why do you think he leaves the last gray fish he rescued on the doorstep of his neighbor?**

He hopes his neighbor will save it and keep it with the other fish.

1. **Why do you think Francisco let the fishing rod Miguelito made float down the river?**

Likely because he had just attempted to save all of those fish.

**Chapter 6: “Christmas Gift” (pages 42-46)**

1. **Why is the family one of the last ones to leave Corcoran when other farmers had better crops? What does this tell you about Papá’s character?**

Papa felt obligated because the farmer let them live in his cabin for free; he is a decent, upright man.

1. **How does the family eat while they have no work?**

Get food out of grocery store trash and cut off the bad pieces, buy bones “for the dog” at the butcher shop

1. **Describe how Francisco feels when his father says “I wish I could, paisano, but we’re broke too.”**

He panics and thinks his hope of getting a ball for Christmas is ruined.

1. **What does Papá tell the couple who comes to sell things?**

That he’s poor too and he’s sorry.

1. **What do the kids get for Christmas? Are they happy about it? Are their parents happy about it? Why?**

Candy; No; No; Because it demonstrates their poverty

1. **What does Papá give Mamá for Christmas? Why is this ironic?**

The white embroidered handkerchief that the pregnant woman made and Mamá thought was beautiful; Papá sent the family away and didn’t buy anything supposedly, and he also only had enough money to buy a handkerchief for 10 cents as her Christmas present (but he did get her something).

**Chapter 7: “Death Forgiven” (pages 47-50)**

1. **Describe El Perico (appearance, disposition, country of origin, former owner, etc.)**

He’s a small red, green, and yellow parrot (a parakeet) that Don Pancho smuggled in from Mexico. He gets extremely angry and goes crazy when Chico and Pilar do not bring their cat spotted black cat Catarina with them when they come to visit. He is also very affectionate to Francisco. His favorite phrase is “periquito bonito,” which means pretty/lovely parakeet.

1. **Why do you think Jiménez describes El Perico as “undocumented” (48), his former owner Don Pancho as “an undocumented farm worker” (47), and Chico and Pilar as “undocumented” (48)?**

Because being undocumented means that you could be deported back to Mexico

1. **What happens to the “undocumented” parrot? What do you think Jiménez is trying to say here?**

He gets killed. Francisco’s father gets upset with El Perico’s tantrum and hits him with a broom. His father had been stressed out regarding work; Probably that the undocumented don’t survive.

1. **What does Francisco do every day after they bury El Perico?**

Visits his grave until they move

**Chapter 8: “Cotton Sack” (pages 51-60)**

1. **Why does Francisco’s father say that he cannot have a cotton sack?**

Because Francisco is too little

1. **Why can’t they pick cotton while it’s raining?**

It’s too wet, and they get paid 3 cents a pound for it. Wet cotton would weigh more.

1. **What ailment does Papá have?**

A bad back

1. **Who is the fastest picker in the family?**

14-year-old Roberto

1. **Francisco says that “[he] was determined to prove to Papá that [he] should get [his] own sack” and that he is “grown-up enough for his own sack” (59). Does he prove himself or not? Explain.**

No, because he gets too cold: his toes turn numb, he can barely move his fingers, his hands turn purple and red, and he ends up peeing on his hands to get them warm (which does not work because his hands just get colder and it stings the scratches on them too)

“I knew then I had not yet earned my own cotton sack” (60)

**Chapter 9: “The Circuit” (pages 61-69)**

1. **Why do you think the author includes one paragraph about the man from Jalisco, the state in Mexico where Francisco is from?**

(Answers may vary.) Perhaps because Francisco says he talked to the man, got to know him, and then he never saw the man again. This is the typical life of migrant workers.

1. **What is Francisco’s view of constantly moving?**

He does not like it.

1. **Why do you think the Carcachita is talked about so much in this book?**

It is basically the only steady thing in Francisco’s life. They don’t have a permanent home, so the car is the closest thing to that.

1. **Who speaks English in order to ask about work?**

Mamá

1. **Where does the family stay?**

In an old garage

1. **Why do Roberto and Francisco hide in the grape vineyard?**

They don’t want to get in trouble for not going to school.

1. **When does Francisco finally enroll in sixth grade? Why can’t Roberto enroll in school until February?**

November; he has to pick cotton

1. **What does Mr. Lema do for Francisco?**

During lunch hours Mr. Lema helps Francisco learn and read English better (for a month).

1. **What happens the same day Mr. Lema offers to teach Francisco how to play the trumpet?**

His family packs up and moves

**Chapter 10: “Learning the Game” (pages 70-79)**

1. **Francisco begins counting down to what day, which is 132 days away?**

When he can return to school

1. **What game do Francisco and the other boys play? Who decides who plays and who doesn’t? Why doesn’t this person want Manuelito to play?**

Kick-The-Can; Carlos; because he’s too slow

1. **Who is the new worker? Where is his family?**

Gabriel; living elsewhere (it sounds like they live in Mexico)

1. **How many hours do Francisco, Roberto, Papá, and Gabriel work?**

12 (6 in the morning to 6 in the evening)

1. **When Francisco and Gabriel are loaned out to a different sharecropper, what does the contratista (labor contractor) want Gabriel to do? Does Gabriel do it? Why or why not? What happens as a result?**

He wants Gabriel to pull the plow like an ox while Francisco directs it.; No; Gabriel says, “In my country, oxen pull plows, not men…I am not an animal” (76); Gabriel gets fired.

1. **What happens later that day when Francisco plays Kick-The-Can? What happens as a result? What does Carlos finally decide?**

Francisco refuses to play Kick-The-Can with Carlos if Manuelito can’t play. Carlos pushes Francisco, Francisco stands up to him saying, “You can push me around, but you can’t force me play” (78); that Manuelito can play.

**Chapter 11: “To Have and to Hold” (pages 80-93)**

1. **What are Francisco’s two most prized possessions?**

His coin collection and his blue notebook (librito)

1. **What two pennies are most important to him? Why?**

A 1910 Lincoln Head – the one his father gave him; the year Papá was born; the year the revolution started in Mexico.

An 1865 Indian Head – the one Carl (a boy from school who was his best friend) gave him; Carl also had a coin collection; Carl lived in a real house (it was the first time Francisco had been in one).

The coins represent memories for Francisco.

1. **What happens the day that Francisco is supposed to show his coin collection to Carl?**

His family moves, and he never sees Carl again.

1. **What does Francisco think Orosi means?**

Oro = gold; Sí = yes

1. **Where did Francisco get his little blue notebook? What does Francisco write in his little blue notebook?**

The city dump in Santa Maria; words, definitions, rules, etc. he wants or needs to learn

1. **In Orosi at Mr. Patrini’s, what type of building does the family live in? Why is this significant?**

An old house (they can only use the first floor); it’s his first time living in an actual house

1. **What happens to Francisco’s coins?**

His four-year-old Rorra steals them and buys red gumballs with them.

1. **What happens to Francisco’s librito? How does Mamá comfort him about it?**

It burns in the fire, along with the house; He knows what was in his librito, so it’s not all lost.

**Chapter 12: “Moving Still” (94-111)**

1. **What is la migra?**

Immigration

1. **Why does Francisco want to return to Santa Maria?**

He gets to attend school there. In Fresno, he has to pick grapes and miss school.

1. **What class does Francisco excel at? What happens when he scores the highest on his quiz?**

Math; he gets the honor of sitting in front

1. **What does Mr. Sims, the principal, help Roberto get?**

A job as a janitor at the school

1. **What is Francisco supposed to memorize for class? Does he get to recite it? Why or why not?**

The first part of the Declaration of Independence; no; the immigration officers come and get him

1. **After reading this chapter and A Note from the Author, what do you think of Francisco’s Papá saying, “Education pays off, *mi’jo*. I am proud of you. Too bad your Mamá and I didn’t have the opportunity to go to school” (108). How do you think his parents view education? His siblings? How does he view it?**

It sounds like they all value education. His parents want their children to have the opportunities they didn’t have. Francisco knows that education is important and will take places. (Answers may vary.)